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OBSERVATIONS

ON

VARIOUS PLANS

OFFERED TO THE PUBLIC,

FOR THE

RELIEF OF THE POOR.

BY THE REV. JOSEPH TOWNSEND,

RECTOR OF PEWSEY, IN WILTSHIRE,

AND LATE OF CLARE HALL, CAMBRIDGE.

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By the Rev. J. Townsend,
Minister of the Gospel,
at the City of London.

MDCCLXXXV

OBSERVATIONS, &c.

TO make a suitable provision for the poor; to ensure for them a comfortable subsistence, without encouraging their neglect of industry; and to assist them in the season of distress, without checking their own efforts to relieve themselves; has occupied the attention of Europe, but more especially of England, for the last two hundred and fifty years.

Previous to that period, beggars were tolerated in their own districts, and vagabonds were scourged. But in proportion as the inconveniences of vagrancy and mendicity were felt, remedies were sought, and a variety of expedients were tried, in

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the constant hope and expectation of bani-
shing distress and poverty, that none
might be inclined to wander or to beg
their bread.

Our pious Edward, from the first mo-
ment that he was seated on the throne,
applied himself in earnest to restrain the
growing evils; and, whilst he provided
houses for the impotent and aged, with
liberty to beg, he marked the sturdy va-
gabonds with hot iron on the breast and
forehead, and made them slaves to the
first person who should seize them. But
in less than three years, convinced either
of the cruelty or folly of this law, he re-
pealed it, and confirmed a statute of the
preceding reign, by which licensed beg-
gars were confined to precincts; and
vagabonds, after being whipped, were
sworn, that they would return to their
own parishes. His sister, Queen Eliza-
beth, who, during a reign of four-and-
forty years, neglected nothing which could
contribute to the happiness of her subjects
and the good government of her domi-
nions,

nions, passed many laws, as the result of long and deep reflection, for preventing vagrancy, and for relieving the distresses of the poor. For vagabonds houses of correction were prepared; alms-houses were to be built upon the wastes for such as were old, lame, or blind; a stock of flax, hemp, wool, thread, iron, and other ware and stuff, was to be provided for setting the poor to work; and a weekly contribution was to be raised for binding poor children 'prentices, and for relieving those who, being unable to work, were destitute of bread; leaving these, however, to the discretion of the parish officers. She limited the numbers of the poor, and prevented their increase, by not suffering cottages to be erected, unless they were endowed each with four acres of land; and at the same time forbidding inmates. The superior wisdom of these laws will appear from hence, that for ninety years there were no complaints to occasion any alteration in them. Yet we must not regard her system as perfect in itself, much

less must we esteem it suitable to the present time. Should this kingdom give up her manufactures, and pay attention only to the cultivation of the soil, the laws of Queen Elizabeth would now be the best.

In the third year after the Revolution, we hear parliament, for the first time, complaining, that by the overseers having abused the unlimited power which had been given to them, the rates for the poor were daily increased; and appointing, that a book should be kept for the parish vestry to make out a list of such persons as they thought fit to receive collection, with the reasons for their seeking aid; that none but such should be relieved, unless by authority under the hand of one justice, excepting those who were infected with pestilential diseases, plague, or small-pox.

From this inordinate liberality of the parish officers, from the complaints of the land owners, and from the remedy provided, I am inclined to think, that although

though the occupier paid the poor rate, it was afterwards, like the land-tax, deducted from his rent. Thus, if my conjecture is well founded, whilst the landlord paid the tax, he was anxious to restrain the overflowing benevolence of the parish officer; but at last, finding all his efforts ineffectual, and the poor's rates constantly increasing, to relieve himself, he threw the burthen directly on his tenant. But now that the land-owner has the distribution of the money, whilst the tenant feels the increasing load, and whilst every gentleman in the commission of the peace is bountiful with his neighbours' property, the cry is changed, and the occupier himself is loudest in his complaint, and in calling, as he justly may, for some alteration in our laws. Nothing can be more unreasonable, nothing more unjust, nothing more impolitic, than to give one man thus a licence to dispose of another man's goods in charity, without his own consent. This the event has proved, and this we may daily see.

If we look into parishes in which magistrates reside upon their own estates, the poor rates are comparatively low, sobriety and industry prevail, and few objects of extreme poverty are seen; whilst all the surrounding parishes are loaded with taxes, and abound with poor; at least I can affirm this to be the case, and I may possibly hereafter prove it to be so, in the neighbourhood in which I live. By this observation, I do not mean to cast any reflection on gentlemen in the commission of the peace. The observation may be just, and they may yet be men of honesty and honour. It rather tells for them, and proves the natural benevolence of the human heart; but at the same time points out one mistaken principle in our laws. Supposing the magistrate to be a man of the best intentions, yet, what can he do? Multitudes apply to him, from all the surrounding parishes. He hears the description of their poverty and wretchedness, but his time will not permit him to visit them in their cottages,

cottages, to enquire into their character, to examine the nature, the cause, and the extent of their distress, to calculate their expences and their gains, to see them at their work, to notice their behaviour, and to detect them, if vicious, in their drunkenness and vices. It is in vain to tell him, that compassion, when not guided by justice, and directed to the general good, is to be considered as a weakness. He is deaf to the remonstrance, and consults only those feelings which give him pleasure, and which nature hath taught us to admire. He listens to the relation of their sufferings, and, knowing that by one stroke of his pen he can administer relief, he too often signs the order, without stopping to consider the injury he may do even to the party applying for his aid, and the injustice he may perhaps be guilty of in taking bread from industry and virtue, to bestow upon indolence and vice.

From the Revolution to this day, the legislature has been constantly complain-

ing of the increasing burthen of parochial taxes, attributing the increase sometimes to one cause, sometimes to another. But in the preamble of an act, passed soon after the accession of the present family, we hear the justices of the peace charged with granting relief under colour of a proviso strained and misapplied; upon untrue suggestions, and sometimes upon false and frivolous pretences. The great increase in the parish rates, parliament attributed to this abuse of power; and to remedy the evil thus clearly stated, they enacted, " that no relief be
 " granted by a justice until oath be made
 " before him of some matter, which he
 " shall judge a reasonable cause, and
 " that application had been made,"
 &c. (9 Geo. cap. 7.) This clause, thus worded, changed at once the whole system of our poor's law, and from this time the evil has advanced with great rapidity. Previous to this act, the legal power of the justice appears to have been to check and to restrain; and the parish
 officers

officers themselves could relieve by their own authority none but those who were infected with pestilential diseases; the aged, as we have already seen, with the lame and the blind, were lodged in alms-houses; raw materials were to be provided for those who wanted work, and the lazy were to be shut up in houses of correction. All other cases were left to the discretion of the parishioners assembled in vestry, who were certainly the proper judges, not only as knowing perfectly the character and conduct of the party applying for relief, but as best able to determine both the time and manner of administering such assistance as the case required. But now, by this unhappy clause, which appears to have slipped in unobserved, the very act which meant to regulate and restrain the blind compassion of the justice, has left all to his discretion. No sooner had this clause began to operate, than parishes, terrified by the incroachments of this new power, began to arm themselves against it. They
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compelled the poor to wear the badge, and set to work in building workhouses. This discretionary power was given to the justices in the year seventeen hundred and twenty-three, and from that period, as we shall soon make appear, workhouses began to multiply. It is difficult to say, which has been most fond of workhouses, the man of science, or the rough unlettered farmer; the one from idle speculation, the other from experience; the one under the vain hope of advancing manufactures, and promoting industry; of gaining much, and spending little: the other, because from behind his workhouse he is better able to defend his property, and bid defiance to the magistrate. It is somewhat astonishing to find among the men of reflection so many advocates for workhouses. Mr. Cary, Sir Richard Lloyd, Sir Josiah Child, all agree in this. Even Burn was of the same opinion when he published the first edition of his Justice, (p. 321.) Lord Hale states the labour
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of each pauper in a workhouse at six pounds eighteen shillings and six pence per annum, and thinks that by means of these England may advance her manufactures, and obtain the balance of trade against all other nations. Henry Fielding recommended establishing in Middlesex a workhouse, or rather city, for five thousand, and an house of correction for six hundred persons, and states the produce of their labour at ten pounds each per annum. A member of parliament, who wrote in the year 1751, proposed to have one common fund, to divide the kingdom into large districts, and to have for each an hospital, a workhouse, and an house of correction; by all which, as he conceived, the poor rates would abate, and in time altogether cease, whilst the husbandry, trade, navigation, wealth, and population of the nation would advance.

Others have been more sanguine in their expectations. Laurence Braddon, in the year 1722, proposed to have one corporation over the whole kingdom,
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which should receive all the present rates; to build near the navigable rivers a sufficient number of collegiate cities, each to be capacious of twenty thousand paupers, with ten thousand acres for them to cultivate. Of these cities he would have ten, at least, for the 200,000 poor within the bills of mortality, and, by this plan, rendered general, he calculated that many million quarters of corn might be deposited in public granaries, to be sold out cheap in times of scarcity; that by their manufactures England would undersell all other nations in the foreign market; and that from the first ten cities might be furnished for government, in case of war, ten thousand seamen at the shortest notice, &c. &c. &c. Such, according to this projector, were to be the benefits of living in community. The wildest of these conceits, we find in a pamphlet published in the year 1777. The author would indeed destroy all workhouses and hospitals, but only that he might substitute in their
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stead towns of refuge, to be built on the waste lands in every part of England, with navigable canals from each to the nearest river. After their establishment, he would not only abolish the poor's rate, but pay off the national debt with the profits of their labour. In these towns, open at all hours to misery, he would receive all who sought admittance. In these he would build ships, and teach the art of navigation. He would likewise from them, and chiefly for their use, fit out vessels for taking fish. In each town he would have a beautiful chapel, with a choir of singers, and a band of music, of which all the performers should be selected from among the blind.

Now, wild and extravagant as are these conceits, they proceed upon the principles assumed by all speculative men, who favour workhouses, that the poor, when thus collected, will do more work, and be maintained cheaper, than when separate in their own cottages.

Only grant the premises, and you cannot reject the most absurd of these conclusions.

After what Dr. M^r Farlan, and others, have written upon this subject, it would be tedious repetition to quote particulars; but in general we may venture to affirm, that the poor, when collected, cost three times as much as in their own cottages, and do not half the work. It is however the more needful again and again to recall this fact to our remembrance, because even in the present moment we find a most respectable man, a member of the House of Commons, one who deserves the highest commendation for his zeal and perseverance, under the auspices of government, taking workhouses into his plan, and such workhouses as have been most condemned, such as are most unwieldy, and the least able to be managed. This gentleman, from whom I have the misfortune to differ in opinion, appeals to experience, and reminds us of what has been done in Norfolk
and

and Suffolk, by incorporating parishes with houses of industry. He tells us, that by means of these the poor rates have been lowered to a considerable degree in all these parishes; whereas, in the parishes adjoining, the rates continued rising. We are ready to allow the facts to be fairly stated; but we cannot grant him the inference he draws from them. We can never agree with him, that great manufactures may be carried on to advantage in parochial or provincial workhouses, or, that by the provisions he has recommended, there will be little or no occasion for a poor's rate. The great savings, to which he refers, we can attribute only to the terror people stand in of confinement, and to the refuge a workhouse offers from the orders of a justice.

In the year 1732, there appeared a strong recommendation of workhouses, with an accurate account of all those which existed at the time, most of which, as it appears by their dates, had been recently

cently established. It states, with precision, the benefit derived from them: but, alas! how transient was this benefit!

At Greenwich, they built a workhouse in 1724, and in 1731 they had lowered the rates from £. 800 per ann. to £. 533; but in 1785 the average of three years returned to parliament was £. 3,197.

St. Paul's, in Bedford. In the year 1732 they had only twenty-one paupers in their workhouse, yet the rates were sunk from £. 300 per ann. to £. 177. 5s. 7½d.; but in 1785 the average was £. 831. 7s. 11d.

At Luton, in Bedfordshire, their workhouse reduced the rates, in 1723, from £. 667. 7s. 2½d. to £. 209. 15s. 2d. This was certainly a striking reduction; but in 1785 the average was £. 1,185. 6s. 4d.

At Stockport, in Cheshire, a workhouse in 1730 reduced the rates from £. 360 to £. 170; but in 1785 the average was £. 556. 4s. 10d.

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At Chelmsford, in Essex, the rates were sunk from £. 500 per ann. at three and six pence, to about £. 143, or one shilling in the pound. To effect this saving, the poor in the workhouse were never suffered to eat till they had done their task. Yet, notwithstanding this regulation, the average in 1785 was got up to £. 1,151. 2s. 1d.

At Colchester, by a workhouse, they sunk their rates from six shillings to three shillings and four pence in the pound, and in the year 1724 they collected only £. 1,800; but yet in 1785 the average was £. 4,373. 7s.

At Hornchurch, the workhouse reduced the rates from £. 500 per ann. to £. 200; but in 1785 the average was £. 617. 6s. 7d.

At St. Albans, they had only thirty-four paupers in their workhouse, to whom they were so indulgent as to allow flesh four times a week, and three hundred weight of sugar per ann.: yet they sunk the rates from £. 566. 19s. 3d. to
C £. 200,

£. 200, besides paying off incumbrances; but in 1785 the average was £. 435. 18 s. 5 d.

At Chatham, in 1725, with seventy-three paupers in their workhouse, whose earnings amounted only to twenty-five pounds, yet the poor rates sunk from £. 945 to £. 574; but in 1785 the average was £. 1,450. 10 s. 3 d.

At Maidstone, the workhouse sunk the rates from £. 1,020 to £. 530; but in 1785 the average was £. 2,254. 17 s. 10 d.

At Stroud, in Kent, the workhouse had thirty paupers, who all together earnt only eight shillings per week; yet this sunk the rates from £. 230 per ann. to £. 133; but in 1785 the average was £. 495. 15 s.

At Tunbridge, in 1728, the workhouse sunk the rates from £. 570 to £. 380; but in 1785 they rose up to £. 1,518. 6 s. 6 d.

At Peterborough, in 1724, they had forty-nine paupers in the workhouse, who earnt only twenty-one pounds ten shillings;

lings; yet the rates sunk from £.499. 18s. to £.227. 9s.; but in 1785 the average was £.906. 17s. 6d.

At Chertsey, in Surry, in 1726, the poor cost £.607. 6s. 3½d.—with a workhouse, the expence sunk to £.395; but in the year 1785 the average was £.961. 4s. 6d.

At Bradford, in Wilts, in 1732, the rates sunk by a workhouse from £.800 per ann. to £.400; but in 1785 the average was £.2,904. 5s. 7d.

By a more recent publication it appears, that at Canterbury fifteen parishes, having in all one hundred and fifty-four paupers, united in 1728, under the power of an act, to build a workhouse, granting no relief to any who were out of it. They have now two hundred in the house, and the rates are raised from £.1,458 to £.2,500, and yet the streets swarm with beggars.

Such then are the boasted advantages of parish workhouses, which operate like the figures which we set up to scare the

birds, till they have learnt first to despise and then to perch upon the object of their terror.

In all the instances adduced above, we see the rates, upon the first opening of the workhouse, sinking nearly to one half; but when the dread is past, the rates rise rapidly again to double of what they had been before. Had these establishments been upon a larger scale, had they comprehended extensive districts, or received the poor of the whole county, the first effect had no doubt been more remarkable, not only as holding out the terror of confinement, but as adding banishment from all their friends to loss of liberty. Yet surely it is not consistent with the wisdom and dignity of parliament to adopt an expedient, which is then only to be defended when it gives to weakness a refuge from oppression.

In Mr. Gilbert's bill, his plan for workhouses is not the only objectionable part. His idea of connecting a farm of twenty acres to each workhouse will never
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be admired by those who know how difficult it is to gain by the cultivation of the soil. In the 68th clause of his bill it is provided, that every year a new average shall be formed for the counties and for the parishes, and that the contribution for each subsequent three years shall be in proportion to the last three years expence of each county and of each parish. Without this provision, the overseers, to whom this bill gives authority to grant relief according to their own discretion, would have no inducement to economy. But then, with this provision, I see no reason why the same contests, which are so frequent at present about parish settlements, should not still subsist.

In the 61st clause it is provided, that the rates in future shall not exceed the average of the years 1783, 1784, 1785. Miserable comfort this, held forth to those who paid from five to ten shillings in the pound on their improved rents; for all who live in manufacturing or in mining parishes! And yet, in justice to Mr.

Gilbert, I must confess, that, should he be able to carry only this one clause, he will be the saviour of his country; because, this granted, every thing else, which we can desire, must follow.

In the 6th clause it is provided, that every overseer shall give to the district agent a plan and description, in writing and drawing, of his parish. Now, if this be a measure of government, it is one thing; but if it be only for the purpose of carrying this bill into execution, it will be an idle expence.

In the heads of a bill, which this gentleman printed in the year 1786, we find encouragement held forth to the friendly societies; but in the bill itself he has dropt this useful measure. It is, however, happy that another gentleman has not only adopted this, and made it the foundation of his bill, but, by combining it with Dr. Price's plan of Annuities, he has produced a more perfect system than any one had hitherto imagined. In the proposal for establishing life annuities in parishes for
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the benefit of the industrious poor, which was printed in 1772, a man at the age of twenty, paying eleven pounds six shillings and six pence, was to receive five pounds per annum from the age of sixty to sixty-five; and ten pounds from sixty-five to seventy; and from the age of seventy, fifteen pounds per annum as long as he lived. But then £. 11. 6s. 6d. is a considerable sum to be deposited at once; a sum, which few young men of twenty years would have had the resolution to save, more especially when they were to look forward forty years before they could receive any advantage from it. This was a degree of forecast not to be expected in youth, and much less in the labouring poor, who have always been remarkable for their want of thought. Besides which, they, who thought at all, would have considered that this deposit was chiefly calculated to relieve the parish rates, to do which the poor can have little inclination. The clubs and societies, which have been set on foot among

the labouring poor for their mutual relief, have been checked and restrained by the same idea almost universally prevailing, that their weekly contributions are only free donations to their respective parishes, and no further useful to themselves than by saving them a painful struggle with the overseers of the poor. These societies, being liable to bad management and plunder, want stability; and, whilst they subsist, too often promote intemperance: besides which, there is a political reason why such private associations, uncontrouled by the civil magistrate, should not be encouraged among the manufacturing poor.

Most of these objections Mr. Rolle has obviated; and had he left no legal demand upon the parish rates, he would have removed them all. The reason and the feelings of the labouring poor would not then be hurt by his compulsive clause, as it would be evident and clear to them, that their contribution was only for themselves. In all other respects
this

this combination of the two plans, for annuities and occasional relief, appears to be well imagined. The weekly contribution is trifling, perhaps too small, surely such as all who are liable to it may pay with ease; and the benefits to be received are not only well secured, but commence the moment they are wanted.

The public is much indebted to this gentleman, who has shewn upon all occasions his great abilities and his good intentions, for the pains he has taken in digesting this plan and bringing it forward. I must, however, take the liberty to make some observations on two clauses in his bill, which I can the more cheerfully do, as they appear not to be essential to his plan. The first is section 36; in which it is provided, that any person obstinately refusing or neglecting to pay his weekly contribution, and applying for aid, shall be confined in the workhouse, and shall continue there until he shall have reimbursed the parish for his keeping. This would be indeed a wretched

wretched plan, if it stood in need of workhouses; but I am persuaded there is no such necessity. Would it not be sufficient to exclude the obstinate from all parochial relief? or, if he must be more severely punished, might not some more effectual punishment be devised than confinement in a workhouse, where the lazy, without anxiety, without care, without fatigue, are better fed, better clothed, better lodged, and better attended in case of sickness, than they can be in their own cottages? Should the parish be compelled to keep them in the workhouse, it must be at a great expence. But it is meant, perhaps, that the parish should always be at liberty to discharge them: then the clause is nugatory; for no parish will ever wait to be reimbursed. If the only option be, either to relieve these obstinate recusants, or to put them in the workhouse, this will be a miserable option, and at all events will bring a heavy burthen on the rates.—The other clause, section 42, requires some discussion.

sion. By this it is provided, that all persons earning one shilling or more per day, may demand work, or six pence per day. The corresponding clause, in 43 El. is certainly preferable to this: the parish officers were to provide flax, hemp, wool, thread, iron, and other ware and stuff, for setting the industrious poor to work. They delivered out the raw material, received it back when wrought, and paid for the workmanship according to its value. But let us suppose, what has often happened, a butcher, baker, miller, cooper, carpenter, or other artificer, who by his improvidence, by prodigality, by vice, has reduced himself to poverty; what work can a parish officer provide for him? Let us suppose a manufacturing parish; When, from the imperfection of our laws, or from any other cause, the manufacture fails, must the parish officers neglect their own concerns, to conduct a manufacture which they do not understand, and which, even under the best management, cannot support itself?

self? Let us suppose a mining parish; When the mines have failed, must the land pay them six pence each per day? From whence then must this revenue proceed? Even whilst the mines were prosperous, the meadow land paid thirty shillings, and the arable twenty shillings, per acre to the poor; when, therefore, by the failure of the mines, the value of land is sinking, and the number of new claimants is increasing, from what funds must they be paid? Who then will occupy the land, upon condition of paying three shillings each per week to this multitude now unemployed? In some of the mining parishes of Cornwall three pounds per acre on all the arable and pasture would not be sufficient to answer the demand. But let us suppose, what is more common; let us suppose a parish in which there are more houses than are needful for the labourers employed in cultivating its lands, and other occupations dependant upon tillage, or useful to the inhabitants: the persons occupying

ing these superabundant cottages, we shall suppose, go out to hay-making and harvest in other parishes, where, for prudential reasons, the cottages have been demolished; each of these may, upon the average, be supposed to gain five pounds for his ten weeks of hay-making and harvest, and being returned, he calls upon the parish officers to provide him work. Now, what work can they provide for him? according to the law of Queen Elizabeth, they might offer him flax, hemp, wool, iron, and other ware and stuff; but now, having no employment for him, according to this intended law, they must allow him three shillings a week for the remaining two and forty weeks, which is equal to six guineas. This, with what he got in harvest, makes eleven pounds six shillings per annum. But supposing either, which is the case in some parts of England, that all the surrounding parishes equally overflow with people, or that the superabundant hands choose to stay at home

home in harvest; you must then allow to each seven pounds sixteen shillings per ann. for doing nothing. But you may perhaps be satisfied with saying, the strength of a nation is in the multitude of people. True, if they are usefully employed: if unemployed, it matters little to the state, whether they are fed in convents or in cottages. If they are to be the strength of the nation, make them so, and let them feel such a degree of pressure, as may engage them to recruit your armies. Were we to judge by what we see in this vicinity, and I am inclined to think we are not singular, I should not hesitate to say, take the young men, who are now maintained in idleness, and you will have no need to hire foreign troops to man your foreign garrisons. But why thus allow one person seven pounds sixteen shillings per ann. when, taking the average of Great Britain, two people must live upon less, or starve? Even in the inland counties, a labourer cannot afford to spend five pounds per annum for his food.

food and cloathing. If then, by his ten weeks of hay-making and harvest, he shall have gained even less than I have stated, he may safely be left to seek employment for himself the remainder of the year. Should you say, Let the parish establish some manufacture for him. The idea of establishing manufactures in every parish in England is wild and extravagant. They depend, and must depend, on local circumstances, and a variety of accidents. But you say, you have peasants unemployed; therefore, at every hazard, force some manufacture. Well then, what manufacture will you teach these peasants? You say, perhaps, Let the choice be left to every parish; but at all events establish manufactures. Nothing is more easy than to echo round the cry "Manufactures; establish manufactures to employ your people, and to banish poverty." But what land-owner in his senses, under the present laws, or even that which is here proposed, would wish to see a manufacture in his parish? Only make wise and
wholesome

wholesome laws, and manufactures will soon find the most convenient spots. Monied men will be happy to employ their capitals, and gentlemen will invite them to settle on their lands. At present, all that you can in reason be expected to do for these superabundant hands, is to furnish them with raw materials, flax, hemp, wool, and iron, and then pay them the full produce of their labour. As for the skill and knowledge to work upon these materials;—till they feel a sufficient pressure, they will never wish to learn, because their pre-election is constantly in favour of agriculture, and the labours of the field. Even when they wish to learn, and are become expert, they themselves should run the risque of competition, and be contented with the market price. Upon any other principle, even gold may be bought too dear.

The general sessions of Glasgow have set us an example, which we should do well to follow. They state, that at Glasgow, in the year 1782, there were seventeen

teen hundred and nineteen families supplied out of the sessions fund; and that, among this number, there was not a single instance of a labourer, having a wife and four children, who received charity, when they had health and work. Many maintained five, or even six children, without asking for assistance. They got from four and six pence to five and six pence per week for wages, and together earnt about fifteen pounds seven shillings and eight pence per annum; and spent as follows:

	£.	s.	d.
To the husband's maintenance and cloathing	-	-	4 15 4
To the wife's ditto	-	-	2 16 4
To four children, at 6 ^d . per week each	-	-	5 12 8
To extraordinaries	-	-	2 13 4
	£.	15	7 8

The sessions have published their tables and accompts, with the names of

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the persons relieved in the first column, their age in the second, the number of their children in the third, their joint earnings in the fourth, after which follows, in the fifth, the weekly allowance granted to them, which is so regulated as to be something less than the deficit of their usual gains.

With this excellent management, the whole contribution for the poor in Glasgow is under three thousand pounds per annum, including, with the above, the expences of their poor-house, and of bread distributed weekly to about one thousand paupers. Now as Glasgow contains thirty-five thousand souls, allowing five persons to a family, we shall have seven thousand families; after which, we shall find that less than two pence per week from each family provides this fund. This fact highly deserves our notice, and the general sessions of Glasgow have merited the thanks of Europe for this example they have set, and for the observations they have published.

Whilst

Whilst we are bestowing praise, we must not forget a judicious account, which appeared last year, of a society in Birmingham for encouraging the industrious poor. They prove most clearly the folly of our present system; and well observe, that were the provision for the poor twice as much as it now is, we should soon find twice the number of poor we now have.

They have adopted Baron Maseres' plan and tables, only giving, by way of greater encouragement, four and an half per cent. instead of three. They have likewise endeavoured to promote the voluntary associations of the industrious poor for mutual aid. I understand that Mr. Wilkison has introduced the same plan at Colebrook Dale.

This effort is noble, this conduct highly to be praised; yet all that they have done, are doing, or can do, will be vain and ineffectual, without a total change in the present system of our laws; for we must ever remember, that

were the provision for the poor twice as much as it now is, we should soon find twice the number of poor we now have.

The justices of the peace for the district of Lindsey, in Lincolnshire, deserve their share of praise. Finding the legislature tardy, on their own authority they came to resolutions, which do credit to their understanding. They declare against workhouses, for the most substantial reasons, the expence at which they are maintained, and the contemptible produce of their labour. They well observe, that when the poor work by compulsion, they are too apt, by awkwardness, negligence, or ill-will, to spoil their work; and that the parish officers, either from good-nature, from indolence, or from being occupied in their own private business, seldom punish. They justly condemn the opinion which had prevailed, that distress arising from wanton idleness is no less entitled to relief than that which inevitable misfortunes

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have

have occasioned. They conclude with recommending workshops, as promoting emulation, good spinning, and good reeling; and as giving to the poor sufficient room to work in, and certainty of employment. In conformity with these principles, they ordered, that no one should have any relief till he had done such work as he was capable of; that materials and convenient places should be provided for setting the poor to work; and that all children should be taught to knit before they were six years old, and to spin before they were nine. In aid of these judicious orders, schools were opened, and premiums were given from the poor rates.

Thomas Firmin, a friend of Abp. Tillotson, had long since delivered the same opinions, which we here find adopted by these respectable gentlemen in Lincolnshire. This truly benevolent and useful citizen gave out raw materials to the industrious poor; and he well remarked, that one shilling earned by labour went

further than two by way of gift. I am happy to find, by the observations of the Earl of Hillsborough, published in 1753, that my sentiments nearly coincide with those which his lordship has delivered. He recommends hospitals for the impotent and children, houses of correction for sturdy beggars, and voluntary contributions for the most needy.

Whatever scheme is offered to the public, for relieving the distresses of the poor, how specious soever in its appearance, will never bear to be examined and discussed, unless it be agreeable to these most obvious principles :

1st. Every man should have the first claim on the produce of his own labour and frugality.

2d. Men will never work so chearfully, so hard, so well, nor make such savings for others as for themselves.

3d. The comforts and luxuries of life should be the rewards of frugality and industry, and should never be granted

to

to the importunity of the idle and the vicious.

4th. No man should expect assistance from another till he has done all which is in his power to help himself.

5th. Whatever aid is given by the public, should be dispensed in such a way as to call forth the most strenuous efforts of the party who is to be relieved, with gratitude to his benefactors, and due subordination to his employers.

6th. Charity, without limits, tends to increase the numbers and distresses of the poor.

From these principles we must not only condemn the whole system of our present poor's law, but every system which stands in need of workhouses. We must commend schools of industry, parochial workshops, and magazines of raw materials; and we must give encouragement, under proper regulations, to friendly societies among the labouring poor. But, above all, we must strenuously con-

tend, that the stated provision made by the public for the poor be limited,

Should parliament vote the quantum, from year to year, as with other taxes; and to begin, should even the enormous sum of two millions be voted, as in fact it would be, according to the plan proposed by Mr. Gilbert, we might yet have room to hope. The sum once limited, would make a distinction in its distribution necessary; and, in equal circumstances of distress, the most worthy object would not only claim but would obtain the preference, at least as far as the inevitable imperfection of all things human will admit of. A distinction once rendered necessary, the determination must naturally be left to those who are best qualified to make it, the minister and the principal inhabitants in every parish, who would then have it in their power to encourage sobriety, industry, and due subordination, among the labouring poor.

Whilst the quantum, as at present, is unbounded, the evils we complain of must

must constantly increase. If the sum is unlimited you will never know when to restrain your benevolence; every, even the least, distress must be instantly relieved, and the poor will have no inducement to look forward in the season of prosperity, or whilst young and healthy, by hard labor and rigid œconomy to make provision for their children, or even for themselves. We have lately seen, in France, the pensions granted by the crown amounting to twenty-eight millions of livres, and going on constantly increasing. Upon remonstrance from the Notables, they are to be reduced, as soon as can be accomplished, to fifteen millions; but should these limits be broken through, they will rise higher than before, having no other bounds than benevolence and distress; the benevolence of the sovereign, and the distress of those who, having this refuge, will be anxious only to avail themselves of it.

In the plan recommended by Mr. Rolle, let us suppose, upon the general average
of

of the kingdom, that you should obtain only two pence from every family per week ; yet, surely, if in such a city as Glasgow the poor are well provided for, and do not cost so much, the poor in England ought never to complain, although no other provision should be made for them. In 1784, the houses which paid tax were seven hundred thousand, those excused on account of poverty, two hundred and eighty thousand ; besides these, I have no doubt there are many unnoticed. But now, if to these nine hundred and eighty thousand houses, we allow one million two hundred thousand families, then, at two pence each per week, we shall have five hundred and two thousand pounds per ann. This sum, were I to judge by my own parish, and by all in this vicinity with which I am acquainted, I should not hesitate to say, is more than was spent upon the poor previous to the discretionary power of relief given to the justices of the peace. But I find, upon recollection,

tion, that near the close of Charles the Second's reign, Davenant, if I mistake not, makes the whole amount of the poor's rates for England and Wales six hundred and sixty-five thousand pounds per annum: this would make the net expences for the poor something more than I have stated; but then I have supposed the sum to be raised, on the average, is only two pence per week from every family. When, however, we consider, that, according to the plan recommended by Mr. Rolle, every thousand pounds stock, as far as twelve thousand, will contribute one penny per week, every man servant two pence, and most maid-servants three halfpence, I am of opinion, that should we state one million as the produce of this new tax, we should be still somewhat below the mark.

It is however a matter of indifference, whilst the demand upon the parish rate is left unlimited, whether the amount of this new tax be only five hundred thousand

land or one million; because this million, or this five hundred thousand pounds, in addition to the two millions now raised annually for the poor, will only serve, in the same proportion, to increase their numbers and to multiply distress.

APPENDIX.

A P P E N D I X.

TO give some general idea of the progress of our poor rates, I have here subjoined the expences of maintaining the poor in four parishes, as far back as I was able to procure them. In the first column I have given the price of wheat, which is the common food of the poor in Wilts: these prices are taken from Smith's Wealth of Nations. From 1769, for want of that authority, I have given the prices at Salisbury.

I am well aware that detached years tell little in the price of corn, because the variations are great and often very sudden; I must therefore here observe, that the average price of sixty years, from 1640 to 1700, was £. 2. 11 s. and the average from 1700 to 1764, was only £. 2. and 6 d.; so that the parish rates have risen, whilst the price of wheat has fallen in those periods.

The

The parish of Pewsey has two hundred houses, one thousand souls; four thousand four hundred and two acres of land, of which one thousand is downe. The rental is £. 3,680. The ale-houses were three, they are now reduced to one. The justices in the vicinity were three, now one only acts. For many years they have had a workhouse.

The parish of Winterbourne Dancy has twenty-six houses, twenty-nine families; no alehouse. The rental is £. 400 per annum. It is three miles from Sarum.

At Hungerford they have one thousand nine hundred souls. The rates are five shillings in the pound. They have sixty in the workhouse, who cost £. 450 per annum, or £. 7. 10s. for each. Their settled allowance for base-born children is eighteen pence a week, and forty shillings to the mother for her lying-in. To married women the justices are not so bountiful.

A S U M-

A SUMMARY VIEW

Of the Expence for maintaining the Poor in the
Parishes of St. John's, Devizes; Pewsey; Hun-
gerford; and Winterbourne Dancy.

A. D.	Price of Wheat per Qr of 9 Bushels.			St. John's in Devizes, Wilts.			Pewsey in Wilts.			Hungerford.			Winterbourne Dancy, Wilts.		
	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.	£.	s.	d.
1613	2	3	8	21	19	—									
1614	2	1	8	20	—	3									
1637	2	13	—	35	1	8									
1642	2	8	—	46	6	9									
1653	1	15	6	61	1	—									
1659	3	6	—	78	2	9½									
1664	2	—	—	84	3	2									
1669	2	4	4	—			14	12	—						
1676	1	18	—	108	13	—									
1689	1	10	—	—			27	—	3						
1697	3	—	—	—			55	2	7						
1700	2	—	—	164	14	7	83	10	8						
1720	1	17	—	149	12	10	93	14	4½						
1722	1	16	—	—			—			232	—	—			
1740	2	10	8	259	11	11									
1749	1	17	—	—			107	4	—	373	—	—			
1758	2	10	—	—			214	8	—	378	—	—	30	13	3
1760	1	16	6	429	3	4	—			—			31	14	8
1769	2	8	—	—			258	2	8½	—			36	19	6
1770	2	—	—	—			224	5	6	—			25	17	—
1777	2	10	—	—			414	17	8	661	—	—	78	5	4
1780	2	—	—	649	5	7½	321	9	10	—			74	5	11½
1784	2	16	—	675	12	9	675	14	7½	1,079	—	—			

F I N I S.

A SUMMARY VIEW

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